

that's allowed, which is pretty much the case with most conventional zoning. Suburban developers are playing with the rules stacked in their favor, so there's no real competition in the marketplace."

Flint argues that the best way for new builders, smart-growth advocates, and concerned citizens to beat back sprawl is to involve themselves in strengthening local school systems. "Radical change in the public school system is the only way the middle class will ever return to urban America," he says.

According to Flint, the fight against sprawl is attracting some surprising and key political figures. Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney has unveiled a point system to award grant money and subsidies to development projects based on sustainability and transit friendliness. Governor Mark Sanford of South Carolina has brought attention to the issue of "school sprawl," or overbuilding new schools and neglecting schools already built (drawing people away from established neighborhoods into new developments). California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger made fighting sprawl part of his election campaign and has hired several smart-growth advocates to leadership positions within the California government, such as Richard Jackson as public-health officer. Jackson's book *Urban Sprawl and Public Health: Designing, Planning, and Building for Healthy Communities* (Island Press, 2004) pointed out that car-dependent suburbanites were more likely to suffer from obesity than their urban counterparts.

Studies aside, Flint sees a difficult battle ahead over these issues of where to live and how to build.

"Getting people to think about the future is difficult," he writes. "Just ask some of the people who end up being the most concerned about sprawl—the millions who move into suburban subdivisions only to have their dreams of the good life spoiled by maddening traffic and water bans, because millions more moved into the next subdivision over. . . . But I'm hopeful. Attitudes change. Life's small awakenings—how nice

it is not to spend so much time commuting or being a full-time chauffeur for the kids—add up. And a little change would go a long way."

—Patrick Tucker

Source: *This Land: The Battle over Sprawl and the Future of America* by Anthony Flint. The Johns Hopkins University Press. 2006. \$24.05. Order online from Futurist Bookshelf, www.wfs.org/bkshelf.htm.

Blabbing on Your Blog

Cyberspace has provided an enormous opportunity for people to meet each other and to share personal details. But making private information public through such services as Facebook, MySpace, and numerous weblog providers could come back to haunt indiscreet users in the future, warn scholars at Purdue University.

"Many students feel that putting all their personal details online is no big deal, but they don't realize posting details about inappropriate behavior and personal information may put them at risk," according to Pablo Malavenda, Purdue's associate dean of students.

Cyberspace is a boon for students interested in participating in virtual communities. More than 9 million college students use the online directory Facebook as a way to meet other people. MySpace is a similar service that does not require affiliation with a school. Such services are best used to connect with friends; network with classmates, professors, and organizations; and rally around important causes and issues, Malavenda recommends.

Where students get into trouble with online communities is not understanding that the information they post may stick around, becoming a paperless but permanent record of their character. So such things as photos and detailed descriptions of a drunken weekend posted in one's blog and hateful or threatening comments posted in another person's blog could easily be discovered by a future employer conducting a simple background check, for example.



Have you been bragging in your blog? Beware what you reveal about yourself online—future employers will know where to look to find out about your true character.

And companies are increasingly scouting for information on these sites, according to Eugene Spafford, an information security specialist at Purdue. He suggests that students not commit anything to cyberspace that they would not commit to print in their hometown newspaper.

"I've seen seemingly confidential material posted years ago show up in unexpected places now, embarrassing or hurting otherwise respectable people," says Spafford. In other words, what you do Friday night and then brag about in your blog may hurt you when you eventually run for public office. And the problem will only compound in the future as the capacity for information storage and retrieval expands and online connectivity becomes more universal.

"These virtual communities are part of today's student culture and are how they communicate," says Malavenda. "Students shouldn't necessarily avoid being a part of it altogether. They just need to make smart decisions about what they choose to post online."

—Cynthia G. Wagner

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